

b₁
(e) forming a metal nitride layer on the rare metal layer after said step (a) and before said step (b), wherein said step (c) is terminated before the rare metal layer is exposed and said step (d) patterns the metal nitride layer and the rare metal layer by using the patterned insulating mask layer.

b₂
25. (Amended) A method of manufacturing a semiconductor device, comprising the steps of:
(a) forming a rare metal layer above a semiconductor substrate formed with semiconductor elements;
(b) forming an insulating mask layer on the rare metal layer;
(c) patterning the insulating mask layer by using a resist pattern;
(d) patterning the rare metal layer by using the patterned insulating mask layer; and
(f) forming an insulating film over the semiconductor substrate, the insulating film covering the patterned insulating mask layer,
wherein said insulating mask layer is a TaO layer.

Please **ADD** the following new claim 26:

b₃
26. (Amended) A method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to claim 15, comprising the step of: (f) forming an insulating film over the semiconductor substrate, the insulating film covering the patterned insulating mask layer.